

# LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY



## COMMISSION ON HISPANIC AFFAIRS

### Promote Latino Participation in Education – Grant In-state Tuition to All Qualified Graduates

#### Background

All across the state, immigrant students push themselves to succeed, to achieve the American Dream and pull themselves and their families out of poverty. They overcome considerable hurdles to be successful students. Many are role models in their schools and communities, and powerful examples of success for their peers. These students did not choose to come here – usually, their parents have brought them to the United States as their families have fled political and economic hardship. But being here, they grow up American – many of them have no recollection of their country of origin. Generally, they are deciding that they want to live in Washington and eventually raise their children here. They do this for the same reasons that have convinced other immigrants to stay in our state for over one hundred and fifty years. Unfortunately, they are not being given the opportunity to make something of themselves, to get a good education and a good job because of the inadequacies of a poorly managed Federal immigration system.

These bills would make college degrees economically accessible to students who have lived in Washington and have graduated from a Washington high school. The bills do this by amending RCW 28B.15.012 to change the definition of residency for the purpose of higher education. To understand the importance of these bills, it is important to understand the immigration system and how it promises some things and denies others. For a country that has always drawn its strength and prosperity from waves of immigrants, our immigration laws are very fickle and confusing – especially to those whose lives are determined by these laws.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service is notoriously mismanaged. Recently, the New York Times reported that in California, immigration officers decided to lessen their considerable caseload backup by arbitrarily shredding some 90,000 applications. Additionally, the Federal Government recognizes the need to address the inadequacies of immigration policies, and there are calls for meaningful immigration reform from across the political spectrum, in Congress and in the White House. There are a number of reform efforts underway that would provide immigrants the much-desired opportunity to legalize their immigration status. Meanwhile, a number of states – including California, Texas, New York, all of which have considerably more undocumented students – have already passed similar legislation that grants students the opportunity to continue their educations. In the meantime, the INS should not be an institution in which we should place our confidence in securing the future of our students. More importantly, we should not sit by and wait for these reforms to occur; rather we should seize this important opportunity and prepare our students for future success.

#### Will these students be able to work when they graduate?

Concern has been expressed that this measure will not be effective because the students affected by this legislation will be unable to work upon graduation from college. Many of these highly qualified students are currently in the process of adjusting their immigration status. However, adjustment is a long, complicated process, often delayed by the INS. We should prepare them now so that when reforms are carried out, the state will have a better-qualified labor pool. The truth is, the state needs all of its students to be successful, and it needs them all to be college educated.

By allowing all qualified students the opportunity to compete for college admission, the state is making the application pool more competitive, which will result in higher academic achievement and a better educated, harder working labor pool. These bills would let the state do just that.

#### Relevant Bills:

**HB 1079**

**SB 5158**

#### Primary Sponsors:

**Rep. Gutiérrez-  
Kenney**

**Sen. Carlson**

This measure gives hard-working students the chance to achieve the American Dream.

This legislation encourages Latinos to stay in school and study hard.

These bills would cost the state nothing – yet the state would reap the great rewards.

*The people of the State of Washington have tasked the Commission on Hispanic Affairs with advising the Governor, the Legislature, and state and local agencies on issues that affect the Latino community of the State. The Commission meets with members of the Latino community six times a year throughout the state to gather information as to their concerns.*